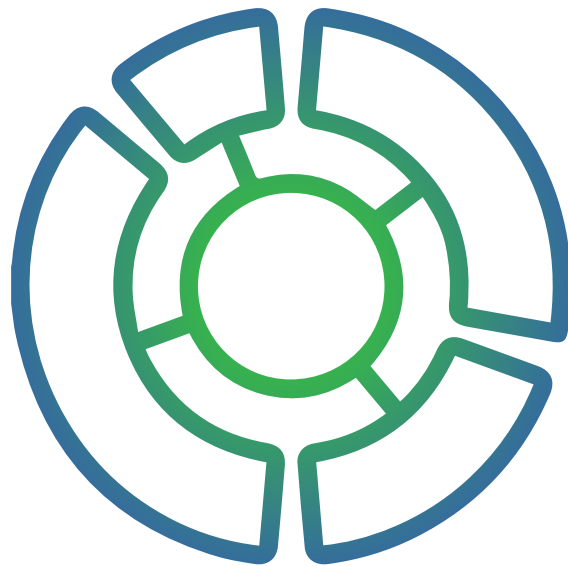




# Open Doors Pre-Budget Submission 2024



[www.opendoorsinitiative.ie](http://www.opendoorsinitiative.ie)

**The Open Doors Initiative (ODI)** creates equitable pathways to employment, further education, and entrepreneurship for marginalised communities. ODI works with corporate business, supporting partners, public bodies, and government departments to deliver impactful programmes that lead out in the area of equity and inclusion.

The work that is carried out by ODI is informed by lived experience and research. It is under-pinned by the business case for diversity and inclusion. Research has shown a more diverse team is better for business and is in line with the SDGs in reducing poverty and exclusion.

Despite the business case for diversity and inclusion being well researched, those seeking employment or engaging with further education are experiencing barriers to access and supports.

Supporting measures that remove barriers to employment, entrepreneurship and further education should be a crucial element in the Government's budget for 2024.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Extend the Accommodation Recognition Payment (Financial Contribution for Hosting Temporary Protection Beneficiaries Scheme) to all households who are hosting a refugee, from any country
- Amalgamate existing employment supports for a person with a disability in to one accessible grant, modelled on the UK's Access to Work Scheme
- Further investment into supports for students who choose to study part-time, as recommended in the National Access strategy
- Develop more Entrepreneurship training for marginalised groups such as those carried out in TUD for people with disabilities and refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, where we have run three courses to date
- Multi-annual funding for an information service to support employers in hiring and retaining employees who have a criminal history
- Continued supports for remote and hybrid working with further investment into accessible remote working spaces, such as The Impact Hub@Crann Centre, Co. Cork

### SUPPORTING MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

ODI's programme, Pathways to Progress, supports migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland to access work and further education. Pathways to Progress has supported 1,633 individuals since launching in May 2022.

#### **Central Strategy: Pathways to Work Strategy 2021 - 2025**

A 2017 report by IHREC and ESRI called [‘Who experiences discrimination in Ireland?’](#) found compared to White Irish respondents, Black respondents are three times more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace and of those who took part in the research 16.5% experienced discrimination in the recruitment process. This was the highest scoring group in this piece of research, the second highest was people with disabilities. Those from a migrant background tend to have to engage with insecure work which is generally below their skill level. The creation of interventions that support job seekers from a migrant background leads to opportunities in meaningful and long term work, which results in social inclusion.

- Extend the Accommodation Recognition Payment (Financial Contribution for Hosting Temporary Protection Beneficiaries Scheme) to all households who are hosting a refugee. The disparity of treatment with refugees from other countries emerging contributes to a lack of equitable treatment and hampers integration aims, including the opportunity for employment
- Audit of the Daily Expenses Allowance assessed against the minimum acceptable standard of living and increase the allowance accordingly
- Offer information to employers about Irish Immigration through training, and invest in the process of applying for work permits as well as research into the area to develop further understanding of the potential pitfalls
- Provide financial assistance for job seeking supports to cover the costs associated, such as transportation and professional attire when starting off
- Deliver intensive language classes, including sector-specific and Irish work culture courses, to help migrants and refugees improve English language skills and increase employability and educational opportunities, as well as supporting integration
- Extend the Free Travel Scheme to offer assistance to refugees and asylum seekers located far from cities to attend job interviews and training sessions
- Investment in grants and supports for employers to create flexible work schedules and accommodations for unemployed migrants and refugees with caregiving responsibilities

## **SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH A CRIMINAL HISTORY**

In partnership with IHREC and IPRT, ODI has funded a piece of research that will explore the impact of employment and further education and barriers experienced by those with a criminal history. This research is being carried out by Maynooth University.

Employment has been identified as one of the key tools in reducing recidivism rates, improving the life of those with a criminal history and as a result creating fewer victims and safer communities. According to a 2019 survey conducted by Solas, over 60% of employers would hire someone with a criminal past if supported to do so (Solas). However, people who have a criminal conviction are facing barriers to employment.

- 81% of respondents in an Irish Penal Reform Trust survey stated having a previous conviction has had a negative impact on their ability to secure work (IPRT)
- CSO report has found that 61% of people released from prison in 2017, had reoffended by 2020 (RTE)

There is an appetite for information, support and training of employers in this area so that those who have experience of the justice system have access to equitable employment.

In 2021, the average cost of a prison space was €80,335 per year. Simply put, by reducing recidivism rates through practical and intentional initiatives, we have an opportunity to positively impact on individual lives, wider society and essential Irish Prison Service and Probation Service funding.

### **Central Strategy: Working to Change: Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021 - 2023**

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- Multi-annual funding for an information service to support employers in hiring and retaining employees who have a criminal history
- Inclusion of the grounds of Criminal Conviction in Equality legislation to ensure that those with experience of the criminal justice system have opportunity to access equitable employment. This will positively impact on recidivism rates
- Investment in self-employment courses for people who have a criminal conviction as well as an audit of current insurance provided to entrepreneurs in this area, with potential for Department of Justice to act as an underwriter for these new businesses where they can't get reasonable insurance cover

## **SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES**

ODI supports two core programmes that work to remove barriers for people with disabilities. Towards Work is a person focused initiative that supports people with disabilities into employment, self-employment and further education.

Employers for Change (EFC) is an employer information service that works with employers to increase awareness of disabilities and improve their hiring and work practices to become more accessible and inclusive.

Unfortunately, according to a report by the European Disability Federation Ireland has been named as the worst country in Europe when it comes to employing people with disabilities. According to the latest CSO results, one in five people in Ireland identify as living with a disability. Ensuring that all members of the disabled community have equitable access to decent work is vital to achieving equality within Irish society.

### **Central Strategy: Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 - 2024**

- Amalgamate existing employment supports for a person with a disability in to one accessible, online based grant, modelled on the UK's Access to Work Scheme
- An additional €30 million in funding should be invested in grants that provide workplace support for people with disabilities
- The Disability Awareness Training Scheme should be made available to all employers without the need to identify a disabled employee. There is currently no uptake of that scheme with its present restrictions
- Empower the jobseeker with a disability to seek work with their supports already in place by removing the onus from the employer to apply for grant support and center them on the person themselves, who can bring them from position to position
- Move all Reasonable Accommodation funds into the Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment as they are employment supports, not social welfare supports
- Increase the Wage Subsidy Scheme from its current level of €6.30 to €7.50 and remove the threshold of 21 hours work per week required to access the scheme
- Extend Make Work Pay to people who no longer qualify for Disability Allowance due to employment, acknowledging that being employed does not remove the cost of living with a disability which ranges from €9,500 to €11,700 pa
- Remove the threshold of 21 hours work per week required to access the Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability - this would enable people with disabilities who may work from 5 to 15 hours per week to access part-time employment
- Introduce an Access Employment Programme for people with disabilities. This programme will subsidise a paid work placement with an employer for up to six months, allowing the jobseeker to retain their full benefits for the duration of the fixed term placement.

- Provide €20m to extend personal assistant supports for those with a physical disability to all forms of employment, not just limited to specific schemes.
- Make all grants and schemes accessible and available to self-employed disabled people is crucial.
- Provide support through local enterprise for disabled entrepreneurs and self-employed people with disabilities.
- Provide guidelines to employers on the Web Accessibility Act before 2025.
- Open a fund for employers to make their website WCAG2.1 AA compliant.
- Create an awareness campaign for a new grants and supports portal whereby the supports are easily accessed by employers and people with disabilities.

### SUPPORTING REMOTE WORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Both internally and externally as an organization, ODI supports remote working for employees and businesses by recognising the positive impact this has on all employees. ODI is a partner of the Impact Hub@The Crann Centre, a fully accessible remote working hub, and in 2021 published a research paper on [‘The Future of Work and Disability - A Remote Opportunity’](#) in partnership with Employers for Change.

#### **Central Strategy: Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy**

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- Continued supports for remote and hybrid working with further investment in accessible remote working spaces, such as The Impact Hub@The Crann Centre, Cork. as laid out in Action 2.8 of the Regional Enterprise Plan 2024
- Develop incentives for companies who have disused buildings to convert them into fully accessible remote work centre. Opening up the current funding to remote working hubs who are not yet established.
- Invest in skills training and remote assistance for unemployed migrants and refugees and those looking to start a new business

### **SUPPORTING FURTHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES**

There are few supports available for those entering full time education. The Back to Education Allowance for those receiving welfare benefits and individual HEIs establish and operate their own scholarships at an institutional level. However, there is no core fund to support an individual who would like to engage in further education at a part-time level.

Open Doors believes in the value of removing barriers to all forms of education whether that be full time or part time. However, there are significant logistical and financial barriers for those who choose part - time education. Our aim is to remove some of these barriers through financial support and mentoring. This will enable the person to upskill and achieve career progression.

We have seen clearly in the past year the impact of the cost of living on individuals. When it comes to extra spending, further education may not be a possibility for those who are already experiencing barriers in other areas of life.

In 2020/2021, 25% of students were studying on a part-time/flexible basis compared to 19.4% in 2015/2016 and 23% in 2019/2020. This shows an increase in a demand for part time learning. Government has acknowledged the need for support of part time students through the National Access Plan 2022 to 2028.

#### **Central Strategy: National Access Plan 2022 - 2028**

- Further investment in to supports for students who choose to study part-time, as recommended in the National Access strategy

**The Open Doors Initiative** is made up of over 125 member companies and supporting partners, who work with government to create pathways to equitable employment, self-employment and further education for those who are marginalised within our communities and wider society.

Member companies are committed to creating working environments which are equitable and inclusive. They believe in the value of supporting a diverse team and show this commitment by signing the ODI Pledge as well as showing their commitment with their member's badge.



As part of the membership pledge, employers commit to creating tangible opportunities for the people Open Doors works with. This can be through paid placements, internships, hosting skill sharing seminars and employment opportunities.

Member companies also take part in awareness training and information seminars to continue on their own DEI journey.

We help people who are marginalised and any intersectionality between the groups:

- Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants
- People with disabilities
- Traveller & Roma community
- LGBTQIA+ community
- People with a criminal history

**The Open Doors Initiative has a proven track record of developing and delivering programmes that support employers in creating equitable opportunities for marginalised communities. Within the Open Doors Initiative, we have several programmes that focus on specific areas of support.**



**Employers for Change** works with companies and organisations to increase awareness of disabilities, and improve their hiring and work practices to become more accessible and inclusive. Since launching in March 2021, Employers for Change has engaged with over 200 employers.



**Towards Work** is a person focused initiative that exists to support individuals with disabilities as they seek employment, further education or setting up their own business to be self-employed. In its first year, Towards Work supported over 300 people with a disability on their journey toward employment, self-employment and further education.



**Pathways to Progress** supports migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland to access work or further education. Pathways to Progress has supported 1,633 individuals since launching in May 2022.





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